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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 143119

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, MP, US

SUBJECT: DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS PLAN FOR MAURITIUS

REF: STATE 139160

1. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY COMMENTS ON FOLLOW-
ING DRAFT COUNTRY PLAN BY JUNE 28. PLEASE SLUG FOR AF
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A. HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS

MAURITIUS IS ONE OF VERY FEW THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES WHOSE
HUMAN RIGHTS RECORDS CAN STAND COMPARISON WITH THE INDUS-
TRIALIZED NATIONS OF THE WEST. IN 1976, MAURITIUS WAS
RATED "FREE" BY FREEDOM HOUSE, ONE OF ONLY THREE AFRICAN
COUNTRIES SO RATED.

THE MAURITIAN GOVERNMENT'S RECORD HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN SO
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GOOD. DURING 1971-1972, IN THE WAKE OF SEVERE COMMUNAL
UNREST AND LEFTIST AGITATION, A STATE OF EMERGENCY WAS DE-
CLARED, PRESS CENSORSHIP WAS IMPOSED, AND A FEW LEFTIST
LEADERS (INCLUDING TOP LEADERS OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENTARY
OPPOSITION) WERE ARBITRARILY DETAINED FOR SOME MONTHS.

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY STILL EXISTS, BUT ON PAPER ONLY.

THE RULE OF LAW PREVAILS UNDER AN EFFECTIVE BRITISH-STYLE LEGAL SYSTEM. THE MAURITIAN PRESS IS FREE, PARTISAN AND ARGUMENTATIVE. THERE ARE NO POLITICAL PRISONERS, NO CHARGES OF TORTURE OR MALTREATMENT OF INMATES AND NO LIMITATIONS ON DOMESTIC OR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL. FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, ASSOCIATION, ASSEMBLY AND EXPRESSION ARE IN FULL FLOWER. IN DECEMBER 1976, 22 POLITICAL PARTIES CONTESTED IN FREE AND SUBSTANTIALLY HONEST ELECTIONS, IN WHICH A PLURALITY WAS WON BY THE OPPOSITION.

THE MAURITIAN GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN FOR ITS CITIZENRY GOES BEYOND BASIC PERSONAL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS. THE GOVERNMENT, FOR EXAMPLE, SUBSIDIZES ALL RELIGIONS WITH A MINIMUM NUMBER OF ADHERENTS. ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES PUT SPECIAL STRESS ON THE WELL-BEING OF THE POPULACE AT LARGE, WITH AUTOMATIC COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES BUILT INTO ALL WAGE SCALES, FREE EDUCATION THROUGH SECONDARY SCHOOL, SUBSIDIZED MEDICAL CARE AND OTHER SOCIAL MEASURES. WHILE RICH BY AFRICAN STANDARDS (1975 PER CAPITA GNP OF \$580), MAURITIUS STRAINS ITS RESOURCES TO PROVIDE THESE SERVICES, AND HAS BEEN CRITICIZED BY STAFF ECONOMISTS OF ONE MULTILATERAL LENDER FOR PAYING TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO SOCIAL WELFARE AND NOT ENOUGH TO FORMATION OF DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL. THERE ARE NO AID OR PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS IN MAURITIUS.

B. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
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IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT MAURITIUS WILL CONTINUE ON THIS EXEMPLARY COURSE. FORMED AFTER THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS, THE RULING LABOR/SOCIAL DEMOCRAT COALITION COMMANDS ONLY A RAZOR THIN MARGIN, AND THE OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) IS BY NO MEANS SO CLEARLY COMMITTED TO HUMAN RIGHTS. MMM SPOKESMEN INSIST THAT THE PARTY IS MORE DEDICATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS THAN ANY OTHER IN MAURITIUS, AT THE SAME TIME PROPOUNDING A THOROUGHLY MARXIST SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAM OF THE SORT THAT HAS NOT PROVEN FERTILE GROUND FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ELSEWHERE. THOUGH THERE ARE SIGNS OF SEVERE STRAIN IN THE MMM RANKS, WHICH MAY INCREASE THE COALITION'S MARGIN, IT IS ALSO QUITE POSSIBLE THAT NEW ELECTIONS COULD BRING THE MMM TO POWER SOON.

ACCORDINGLY, WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS IN THE INTEREST OF CONTINUED EXCELLENT OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN MAURITIUS FOR US TO TAKE NOTE OF AND REWARD THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE. THE OPTIONS INCLUDE:

1. VOICE EXPLICIT PRAISE OF MAURITIUS' HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD ON THE NEXT OCCASION FOR A PUBLIC EXCHANGE WITH THE

GOVERNMENT (PERHAPS ON THE JULY 2 OCCASION OF THE TURN-OVER OF THE OAU CHAIRMANSHIP);

2. EXPAND SELF-HELP AID TO MAURITIUS BEYOND THE CURRENT \$30,000, ACCOMPANIED BY APPROPRIATE PUBLIC PRAISE FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ITS PEOPLE;

3. INITIATE SUBSTANTIAL ECONOMIC AID TO DISTINCT DE-PRESSED SECTORS OF THE MAURITIAN ECONOMY (SUCH AS RODRIGUES ISLAND) AGAIN LINKING THE AID TO MAURITIUS' HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD.

MAURITIANS WOULD GREET THIS SORT OF INITIATIVE BY THE UNITED STATES WITH PLEASURE AND A GOOD DEAL OF PRIDE. TO CONFIDENTIAL

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THE EXTENT THAT TANGIBLE EXPRESSIONS OF OUR APPROVAL STRENGTHEN THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVANCE WOULD PROBABLY BE ENHANCED. AT A MINIMUM, INCREASED ASSISTANCE SHOULD HELP TO FOSTER CONTINUED GOOD RELATIONS, AND TO HELP PROTECT ACCESS TO MAURITIAN PORT FACILITIES BY OUR NAVAL VESSELS.

REALISTICALLY, THOUGH, US AID OR OTHER EFFORTS TO IN-FLUENCE MAURITIAN POLITICS ARE UNLIKELY TO BE DECISIVE.

SHOULD AN MMM GOVERNMENT TAKE POWER AND ELECT TO STEER MAURITIUS AWAY FROM ITS PRESENT COURSE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANY FEASIBLE PRESENT OR FUTURE US ACTIONS WILL DO MUCH TO ALTER MMM DECISIONS IN THIS REGARD.

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